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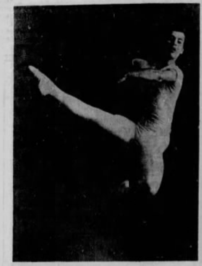

BALLET CONCERT: Two of the National Ballet's leading stars, Veronica Tennant and Jeremy Blanton, above, will dance the leading roles in a special program at the Port Royal Theatre on Thursday and Friday of next week. Soloist Andre Oxenham is another of the 18 featured dancers to appear with this chamber ensemble of the National Ballet of Canada.

Bill Haley is back and so is his unique brand of rock 'n' roll

By JUAN RODRIGUEZ

Last April, the grand-daddy of rock-and-roll, Bill Haley (remember Rock Around the Clock, See You Later, Alligator?), was minding his own business, doing his thing. The golden days of Bill Haley and the Comets were over, and he was used to playing in small clubs and ballrooms. He had been doing this for the past five or six years and he enjoyed it. He never died when the golden age of rock slipped. He just kept on playing to anyone who would still listen. So, a few months ago, Haley was on a tour of Western Canada, when someone told him that Rock Around the Clock was, for some strange reason, at the top of the British hit parade. Bill Haley records were the rage with England's fashion-conscious mods. Old-fashioned rock was coming back.

During the past four months, Bill Haley and his Comets have played to over two million people in a tour of Europe. They played the same music they played years ago, and they received the same response. Screams, dancing, tears, adulation.

All of a sudden, simple rock and roll was the big thing. The Beatles issued a song called Lady Madonna that featured barroom piano and yakety-yak saxes. (Their new song, Revolution, is a throw-back to the style of Chuck Berry.) The Rolling Stones dropped their sitars and put out Jumpin' Jack Flash, a number that stings with the old rock style guitar. Even Fats Domino got into the act; he outdid the Beatles in his own version of Lady Madonna.

Bill Haley is back in America, and he recently appeared in Montreal at the Esquire Show Bar. He is now over forty, and even though he looks a bit silly swaying back and forth with his guitar, he is still substantially the same. Time has done a few inevitable things to his face ,but it has not changed his outlook. His hair is slightly thinner, but that famous baby-curl still droops over his forehead, and it's obvious that he's the same ol' Bill Haley. The Rock Revival took him by surprise, but he answers questions with aplomb and confidence and overbearing humility. "I think what happened," he will say with friendly, casual phrasing, "is that the kids, for want of something new, got out their moms and dads' old records, old hits by Bill Haley, Elvis Presley, Fats Domino, Little Richard, and it was something new to them, and they enjoyed it."

Bill Haley doesn't like to say anything mean about today's rock music, as a matter of fact, he's a "great fan of all our modern day groups," but he thinks that his brand of rock 'n' roll is what "the kids" are looking for.

"You gotta remember that young people wanna have fun, they wanna go to parties. That's the time of life, when you're a teenager, to enjoy life. I think there were too many protest songs, too many serious songs. The world is serious enough without having it creep into the hit parade. Kids wanna have fun. They're out to have a good time, and if you give them a good dance beat and a good happy melody, they'll appreciate it."

Nothing has changed for Bill Haley. Kids are still kids, they still wear white T-shirts and Elvis Presley ducktail haircuts and bobbie-sox. But although his philosophies on "the youngsters" sound as if they should be installed in a museum, Bill Haley is very articulate. He knows his music inside out. According to Haley, he invented rock 'n' roll in 1951. He and his Comets were then a country and western outfit, but Haley was "a great fan" of the black rhythm and blues music.

There was a wide distance between the two types of music, but when Haley started singing rhythm 'n' blues songs in his act, the gap ended; rock 'n' roll was born, and "it revolutionized the whole music business."

"People like it because it was down to earth music for down to earth people. That is why rock 'n' roll music came in then and why it is still popular today. I think it will prove, as time goes by, to be the most popular music in the history of show business."

In performance, Bill Haley and the Comets are a unique ensemble. They lack the sex-appeal of the early Presley, and the funk of Fats Domino is not there either, and their music is certainly devoid of any artistic merit. But Haley's band has something that others don't have. Haley is an original, he's a professional, and the music his band produces is tight and controlled and it bounces. The blaring saxaphone solos and rural guitar stylings are corny, for sure, but they are somehow rather refreshing amid all the pomp of modern-day rock. And Bill Haley and the Comets are good to dance to, and if dancing were the only thing in the world I'd certainly claim Bill Haley as my leader.

Haley has been playing for close to twenty-five years. Two of the original Comets remain. The rest of the band is very young but they still manage to look as if they came straight out of a Norma Rockwell painting.

When I asked him what the most important event in the life of Bill Haley, the Rock 'n' Roll Artist, was, he chuckled confidently and said, "Gee, that's hard to say." Then he proceeded to tell me that he's been in nine movies, has sold 65 million records, toured the world four times, has played for the Queen, for Presidents, and for "just about royalty everywhere."

But, Haley maintains, those aren't the real thrills. "The greatest thrill, still, for me is just to walk out on stage and have a good audience. That's always a thrill for any entertainer, if he really is an entertainer. Every night when we walk out, it's always brand new for us."

New records of Sibelius, Dvorak, Mozart

By JACOB SISKIND

Herbert von Karajan continues his traversal of the complete works of Sibelius with a new record (DGG 139032) that contains both the sixth and seventh Symphonies. The orchestra is the Berlin Philharmonic, one of the most prestigious in Europe today, and the performances are typical — brilliant, penetrating, slick and technically impeccable.

There are those who prefer a more relaxed approach to Sibelius but these interpretations are first class examples of their kind.

Eugene Ormandy fans will be pleased to hear his latest recording of the Dvorak New World Symphony (Columbia MS 7089), not merely because the performance and recording are excellent, but because this time he is conducting not the Philadelphia Orchestra but the London Symphony.

Ormandy's detractors have claimed for years that the fine quality of the Philadelphia orchestra is due not to Ormandy's direction but to the groundwork laid 30 years ago by Leopold Stokowski. If ever Ormandy needed proof that he could "do it" with another orchestra he has it here.

The London Symphony, one of the most flexible and most accomplished in the world, produces the Ormandy sound for him. It is not quite as luscious at that you hear from the Philadelphia Orchestra but it is very close. The sound, as Ormandy has said so many times, is in his head, and he has recreated it in London.

Those who look for the unusual will welcome a new release of two works by Hans Werner Henze — Musen Siziliens and Moralitaten. (DGG 139374). The Muses of Sicily is a concerto in three movements for chorus, two pianos, wind band and tympani.

The Moralities were composed for the Cincinnati Music Festival last year are settings of three plays by W. H. Auden after Aesop fables.

The performances are under the direction of the composer and so must be considered authentic.

Slipping back in time some two centuries we come to two identical projects being attacked by artists of entirely different temperament. Glenn Gould and Lili Kraus are both in the process of recording all of the Mozart piano sonatas. The first volumes of each set are now available.

Gould, by omitting repeats and setting ridiculously fast tempi, gets the first five sonatas on one record (Columbia MS 7097). So much of the playing is superb that one wishes that the man who produced the record had prevailed on Gould to adopt more reasonable speeds in the outside movements. Gould plays so well that you wish he would slow down enough to let you enjoy his performances. It is like trying to take in Banff and Lake Louise in one jet fly-past.

Lili Kraus has the Sonatas Nos. 3, 5 and 14 with the usual Fantasia before the fourteenth in her first volume (Epic BC 1382). Her playing is more traditional, almost sentimental and I don't agree with everything she chooses to do, but it is warm, human playing of a kind we rarely hear today.

The two approaches are so antitheatical that it is good to have both on hand, and play one after the other as antidotes.

Gould has also begun his traversal of the second volume of the Bach Well Tempered Clavier, and has the first 8 preludes and Fugues on one record (Columbia MS 7099). His performances are at once exciting and exasperating. He plays a work beautifully and then gratuitously throws in a special Gould effect that ruins the remainder of the performance.

But as always his ideas are fascinating. Perhaps the thing to do is get a tape recording of the pieces and then snip out the annoying bits — that's the sort of thing Gould would do himself.

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